

An Introduction To

# NUMISMATIC RESEARCH

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*for the*

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Based on curricula from Department of History and Philosophy of Science,  
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# What is Numismatic Research?

- ▣ It's the collection and analysis of data to:
  - Understand reports or observations made by others;
  - Test hypotheses concerning causes, effects or trends that may help explain past events.

# Purpose of Numismatic Research

- ▣ Understand past practices and their relationship to coins and medals.
- ▣ Verify, modify or challenge earlier publications.
- ▣ Locate previously unknown information.
- ▣ Encourage additional or new research paths.

# Steps Involved in Historical Research

- ▣ Define the subject or problem.
- ▣ It should be:
  - a numismatic subject in which you are interested;
  - a specific issue, coin, controversy, technique, person, etc. that is related to the issue or subject.
- ▣ Decide what you expect to learn about the subject.
- ▣ Limit the scope of your research – better to begin small and expand than to start big and lose focus.

# Sources of Information

- ▣ Primary (rarely on-line)
  - Eye or ear witnesses
  - Original Mint or Treasury documents
  - Personal papers of participants
- ▣ Secondary (print and on-line)
  - Books
  - Periodicals
  - Newspapers
  - Encyclopedias
  - Review of research and other references

# Where and How to Begin

- ▣ Let's use the famous 1895 Morgan silver dollar as our topic. Here's a link to an article to which you can refer:
  - <https://archive.org/download/BurdetteNNPS6slides2/BurdetteNNPS6slides2.pdf>
- ▣ Pre-research investigation – prior work and defining your search
  - Look on-line and in hobby publications (books and auction catalogs) for information about your topic.
  - Copy and read everything you find, even if it is repetitious or outdated. Right now you are collecting data not analyzing it



# Collecting Data

- ▣ Keep track of all your contacts.
- ▣ Title and URL, author, age of data.
- ▣ Here's an example of a beginning search for 1895 dollars.
- ▣ [Web Search](#)

# Collecting Data

- ▣ A Google search returned a lot of 'hits,' but we have to sift through them to find useful material. Look for non-sales oriented sites. Look for published articles. Look for names of recognized hobby authorities.
- ▣ Here's one of the on-line sources. This one is from a 25-year old book by Q. David Bowers and Mark Borckardt:
- ▣ [Bowers](#) (scroll)



# Collecting Data

- ▣ Here's data from NGC:
- ▣ [NGC](#) (scroll)
- ▣ Here's a PCGS site:
- ▣ [PCGS](#) (scroll)
- ▣ As you can see, there are hundreds of possible sites. Further, the sites listed on the first page or two might not be the best.
- ▣ With a little practice you'll get the 'feel' for which sites have useful numismatic data and which are just selling smoke.

# Consolidate

- ▣ Consolidate data from several sites.
- ▣ Extract from your data:
  - Who was involved,
  - What was done,
  - When was it done,
  - Where was it done,
  - Why was it done.

# Digging In at an Archive

- ▣ If you go to any archive – national, congressional, university, state – you will be expected to have some information concerning where to search. You cannot walk in and ask someone to locate everything on 1895 silver dollars. You'll get a blank stare and maybe directions to search their database.
- ▣ Begin with results from your who, what, when, where and why questions.
  - Where and When narrow your search to a place and time – in this case, Philadelphia Mint in 1895.

# What to Expect

- ▣ Research libraries and archives have strict rules about accessing and using materials.
  - You will have to register
  - Follow all their rules
  - Pass through security screening before you enter and before your leave.
  - There will also be constant scrutiny of everything you do.

# Example - NARA

- ▣ An archivist can help you locate the broad category of the U.S. Mint at Philadelphia.
- ▣ They will probably direct you to a “finding aid” and you will have to look through the descriptions for something that might include the place and time of interest.



# Example - NARA

- ▣ You will complete a form like this to request documents.

REFERENCE SERVICE SLIP *SHADED BOXES FOR NARA USE ONLY*				DATE (MM/DD/YYYY) 02/23/2018	TRACKING NUMBER
LAST NAME (PRINT) BURDETTE		FIRST NAME (PRINT) ROGER		RESEARCHER CARD NUMBER 126112	
SERIES OR COLLECTION NAME U.S. MINT					
RECORD GROUP NUMBER/ COLLECTION DESIGNATION 104		ENTRY NUMBER 229	NATIONAL ARCHIVES IDENTIFIER (OPTIONAL) 7065060	BOX/ITEM NOS. REQUESTED Box 70-75	
STACK 450	ROW 66	COMPARTMENT 19-27	SHELF 5-01	NUMBER OF BOXES/ITEMS PULLED	
OTHER RECORD IDENTIFICATION INFORMATION [SPECIFY FOLDER TITLE(S)/FILE NUMBER(S)] "LETTERS RECEIVED"					
REQUEST REVIEWED BY			REQUEST PULLED BY		
RECEIVED BY		DATE (MM/DD/YYYY)	REFILED BY		DATE (MM/DD/YYYY)
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION			DO NOT REMOVE FROM RECORDS		NA 14001 (08-16) Required by NARA 1572

- ▣ Then wait an hour or more to receive your order.



# Example - NARA

- ▣ What to look for.
  - Letters sent and received mentioning silver dollars of 1895
  - Coinage journals
  - Log books
  - Director's Annual Reports
  - Annual Assay Commission Reports
  - Special Assay Reports
- ▣ Mint documents have limited organization

# Newman Numismatic Portal

- ▣ The Newman Numismatic Portal (NNP) on-line has an extensive digital database of auction catalogs, hobby publications and a growing archive of U.S. Mint documents.
- ▣ Here's an auction catalog sample frm NNP.
  - [Auction Catalog](#)
  - [U.S. Mint Documents](#)
- ▣ Here's a Library of Congress document sample.
  - [Mint Document](#)

# Lost and Found

- ▣ At this point you have invested a lot of time and work in finding data. Don't lose it.
- ▣ Every time you find something that might be of interest, make a copy, then write its location on every page.
  - For large archives this will include:
    - ▣ Record Group
    - ▣ Entry
    - ▣ Box or volume
    - ▣ Folder or page

# Evaluating Numismatic Sources

## ▣ On-line Sources

- ▣ Most internet sources are out of date or false in whole or in part
- ▣ Strong bias toward selling rather than informing

## ▣ Auction Catalogs

- ▣ Often use facts indiscriminately to motivate buyers.

## ▣ U.S. Mint

- ▣ Most U.S. Mint materials were for internal use and of high reliability
- ▣ Letters from the Mint to ordinary citizens are not necessarily complete or accurate

# Data Analysis in Historical Research

- ▣ Methodology to synthesize a large amount of data into a meaningful narrative
  - ▣ Organize information into categories
  - ▣ Locate patterns or themes
  - ▣ Develop a coding system to relate documents to each other

# Organizing Results

- ▣ A simple organization plan will help you prepare results that others can read and comprehend.
- ▣ The basic categories are:
  - General background
  - Process or coin background
  - Present your data and analysis
  - Summarize and make conclusions



# King of Morgan Dollars Revisited

- ▣ Let's look through the printed article
  - What are the main sections of the article?
  - What does the background accomplish?
  - How are data presented and analyzed?
  - Notice conclusions occur only after all data and analysis is complete
  - Do the conclusions suggest further research?

# Think Like A Judge

- ▣ A real Judge's Instructions to a Jury:
  - Pay close attention to testimony “as it's given”
  - Give careful attention to all evidence presented
  - Keep an open mind and not express an opinion about the case until they have heard all evidence
  - Not watch, read, or listen to any programs or information about the case
  - Not let anything they see or hear outside court influence their opinion
  - Not focus on what someone might have done or said, and instead focus on facts
  - Use common sense when making a judgement

# Think Like A Judge

- ▣ A real Researcher's Self-instructions:
  - Pay close attention to data “as it's located;”
  - Give careful attention to all information located;
  - Keep an open mind and do not form an opinion until you have examined all evidence;
  - Do not read, watch, or listen to any outside information about the subject while collecting data;
  - Do not focus on what might have happened, and instead focus on facts;
  - Consult books and others' research *only* after acquiring original data;
  - Use common sense when making a conclusion.

# Final Thoughts

- ▣ Numismatic research allows investigation of topics and questions that can be studied in no other way.
- ▣ Build your arguments on facts.
- ▣ Approach each topic as if you were telling the story to others.
- ▣ This presentation is available for personal use at:
  - <https://archive.org/download/BurdetteNNPS6slides1/BurdetteNNPS6slides1.pdf>